Growing the Iraqi Security Forces

Major Steven M. Miska, U.S. Army

The political record suggests that even the most valid counter-guerilla tactics provided transitory victory that gained meaning only when exploited politically. . . .

—Robert B. Asprey in *War in the Shadows: The Guerilla in History*[1]

POLITICAL LEADERS in America and military leaders in Iraq have repeatedly emphasized the importance of building up Iraqi security forces (ISF) as a foundation for the rule of law, economic progress, and political stability. Underlying the strategy is the ancient proverb "Give a man a fish, and you feed him for a day; teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime."

Arming a democratic Iraq with the internal and external security to defend itself will be a political victory that will allow the United States to withdraw from operations. Military units across the Iraqi theater have spent a tremendous amount of energy and resources to help produce an Iraqi National Guard (ING), civic and border police, and special operations and regular army units. Much remains to be done, but the U.S. Army has laid a solid foundation for democracy despite the persistent barbs of a stubborn insurgency.

Recent operations in Samarra, a city of 300,000 in Iraq's Sunni Triangle, illustrate why the ISF holds the key to Iraq's future. Coalition forces easily regained control of Samarra overnight after a brigade combat team assault combined with elements of three ING battalions, the 7th Iraqi Army (IA) Battalion, and the 2d Ministry of the Interior Commando Battalion. After only a day of combat, the insurgents fled, died fighting, or went to ground in Samarra.

That the insurgents stood their ground at all against mechanized forces came as a surprise. As former CBS reporter and author Robert Taber explains, "[G]uerrillas restrict their] operations to nibbling around the edges of the opposing army and fighting in the enemy's rear areas. Materially unable to face a military decision, they must of necessity await a political decision."[2]

Operations in Samarra rapidly shifted to locating any remaining insurgents and weapons caches and returning the city to normalcy. Iraqi forces quickly exceeded coalition force (CF) capabilities in gathering intelligence because they could communicate with Samarra's inhabitants in their native tongue without relying on interpreters. The ISF rapidly developed credibility, but the lack of effective law enforcement led the city's inhabitants to doubt the CF could maintain a lasting peace in Samarra. The CF quickly began training and resourcing a police force that could assume control and maintain order within the city. Without a police force, the tactical victory in Samarra was the equivalent of giving the citizens a fish; providing a police force would teach them how to fish. But training policemen to stand up to an insurgency is not easy. The insurgents harassed and intimidated ISF leaders and their families, creating a climate of uncertainty that the CF and ISF still contend with.

Protecting the Populace

To defeat an insurgency you must win over the populace, not simply win the tactical battle. Defeating insurgents on the field of conflict requires sufficient combat power, but winning over the population by helping them achieve a better future requires economic opportunity, security, and stability. Iraqis are pragmatic. If the government

can provide jobs for the heads of households and security for families while ensuring that insurgents will not destroy that hope, the people can be won over. Most Iraqis do not believe the United States will remain in Iraq for the long term, given repeated U.S. policy statements about not wanting to be an occupying power. However, if U.S. forces leave, the Iraqis must have a credible force in place to continue the rule of law. An effective police force best provides stability and security at the level where individual families make decisions. Given the prospect for a better tomorrow, most Iraqis will tolerate occupation efforts as long as the coalition takes no actions to aggravate existing anti-Western sentiment, which is why the United States emphasizes developing ISF capacities and capabilities.

How does a task force (TF) build an ISF that can offer enduring peace? Committed leadership dedicated to a commander's vision is one fundamental ingredient. At the battalion TF level, this translates into taking the command's strategic lines of operation and committing the manpower and resources necessary to accomplish specific, measurable goals.

The first step in creating a force capable of protecting the Iraqi people is to focus energy on designing a strategic vision based on the theater campaign plan, lines of operation, and any measures of effectiveness (MOEs) developed in operations orders and targeting processes. Economic, political, security, and information operations (IO) measures should be defined in that strategy. Although these might be broad-based, applying them creatively requires refining them into comprehensible goals at the soldier level.

In Samarra, Task Force 1-18 developed a model to apply a strategy that rested on platoon discipline and training. (See figure 1.) The basic premise was that no one platoon could win the campaign, but any platoon could lose it, or at least severely set relations back, as Abu Ghraib attests. The strategy incorporated the pillars of economy, governance, and security all built on a foundation of disciplined platoons and focused IO.

Information emanates from everything a unit does—the way soldiers wear their kit, the way messages are announced to local leaders, the way soldiers conduct operations and treat people. All of these things send signals to the populace and to the enemy—signals that reveal a unit's reputation, level of training, and inten-

tions. For example, by purposely wearing elbow and knee pads for protection in urban environments, TF 1-18 created a storm-trooper image. The enemy immediately recognized a different type of soldier, although the previous unit in Tikrit had been just as aggressive. Still, TF 1-18's soldiers did not alienate the public while striking fear in the enemy. Tactics such as carrying weapons at the low ready, waving to children, and paying for damages during raids and other operations helped create an impression of evenhandedness.

Driving a Wedge Between the Populace and Insurgents

Building security forces, creating economic opportunity, and developing fledgling government programs helped drive a wedge between the population and the insurgents. The key to stymieing an insurgency is winning over the population, for "if the insurgents can gain control over the population through fear, popular appeal, or . . . a mixture of both, they stand a good chance of winning."[3]

Insurgents must fight asymmetrically. To plan and resource attacks, they require safe havens—areas isolated from counterinsurgent power through geography or areas a population provides through passive acceptance or active support of the insurgency. In urban environments, the populace often provides the necessary safe haven. Although most people might simply be fence-sitters with respect to supporting the insurgent cause, a unit that does not follow a strategy of creating future opportunities for the majority of the population can quickly create safe havens and additional enemies. Strategy must simultaneously focus on providing economic progress, local self-governance, credible security forces, and favorable publicity about counterinsurgent achievements.
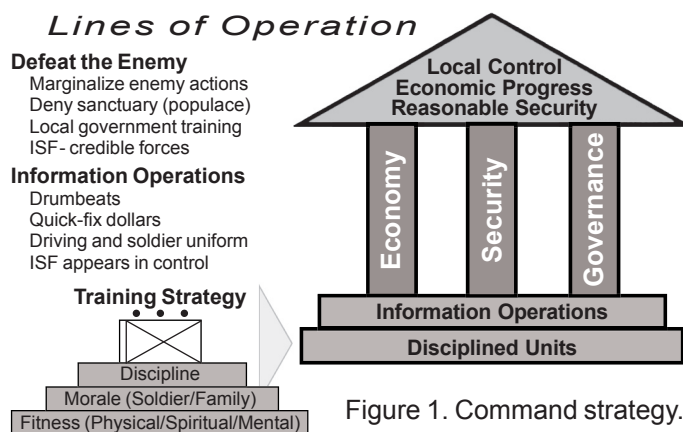

Figure 1. Command strategy.

The current theater campaign plan in Iraq focuses on building a credible ISF that will eventually turn Iraq into a sovereign nation and allow the United States and other coalition nations to scale back their commitments. At the TF level, building a credible ISF means—

• Recruiting and training an ING battalion.
• Creating a fully functional joint coordination center (JCC).
• Training and resourcing local police and police stations.
• Training and resourcing local emergency responders.
• Integrating all of the above forces into an overall security plan to protect the common citizen.

Building Credible Security Forces

Figure 2 depicts a commander's assessment of four lines of operation with an emphasis on developing credible security forces. A capable ISF provides security, which enables local control and rule of law, economic progress, and job creation. Once this positive cycle begins, economic growth leads to higher employment, which promotes more stability.

Task forces must define ISF roles and responsibilities, which might differ from traditional police and National Guard duties. (For example, the ING plays a major role in combating a domestic insurgency, a challenge the U.S. Army National Guard does not face.) In Iraq, security forces play many roles in a city. No Iraqi Army or border security units were present in Tikrit, but other cities and regions in Iraq required border security (or Special Forces units or IA battalions). Iraq's security requires—

• Iraqi National Police (INP). Civic police interface most closely with the people and provide the ISF and CF with information. Police must be able to defend themselves, as well as defend citizens. This requires training to build confidence and effective systems at police stations.
• Iraqi National Guard. The ING can defeat insurgents, generate public trust and self confidence, and conduct raids and military operations inside Iraq.
• Emergency Services Units (ESUs). ESUs are special police SWAT units that conduct raids and searches in coordination with the INP, ING, and CF and when applicable, train INP personnel.
• Joint Coordination Center (JCC). The JCC coordinates and synchronizes the activities of security and emergency response forces within a city or region and provides the command and control infrastructure for security. The JCC is part of city government. Because the Iraqi kada (county) system stovepipes funding from Baghdad to provincial

Security	• Iraqi Security Forces (ISF)/Joint Coordination Center (JCC). Tikrit area on track to achieve local control by 1 December. ISF operations controlled through JCC. • Iraqi National Guard (ING) platoon collective task validation, 1 December. Iraqi National Police (INP) demonstrate marked improvement in local control but still suffer from tribal favoritism. Continue to promote ISF credibility. • Coalition force-overall secure. Complex entry points, contingency plans (CONPLANs), and rehearsals complete. • Government facilities and fixed sites-overall secure. All municipal-level facilities secure. Continue to upgrade satellite stations and facilities. ISF provides security. • Population-overall secure. Reasonable security exists with majority of incidents coming from civil crimes.
Governance	• City council prioritizes economic development projects • Progressing. All municipal government functions execute programs for growth in city government. Coaching continues to sustain momentum. • Newly formed national and provincial institutions will initially slow growth. • Task Force New Dawn governmental training tasks are working. • Favoritism and tribal affiliation still dominate. Vanguard area of operation (AO).
Economy	• Focus is on Job Corps, key job-producing project to gain influence with former Iraqi Army. • Pushing small-business center project. 1st Infantry Division "Minister of Commerce" has developed a proposal in conjunction with U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). • In conjunction with USAID, U.S. is submitting short-term employment projects to bridge the gap between now and when larger projects begin. • Commander's Emergency Response Program (CERP) is on track in accordance with project list.
Information Operations	• Build Iraqi confidence through aggressive campaign to highlight successes. • Promote ING as a credible force trusted by public and feared by insurgents. • Engagement programs tied to quick dollars continue to improve attitude of overall population. • Information dominance continues through marginalizing kinetic operations and selling New Dawn talking points to leaders and population.

Figure 2. Example of commander's assessment –Tikrit.

ministries, city governments have little control over purse strings. Lacking fiscal authority, city mayors must petition county ministries to provide resources for city security and economic progress. The JCC gives city mayors a voice in security matters and is a mechanism that enables police chiefs and other security officials to respond to city mayor directives.

Units should focus on building ISF confidence, promoting public trust, and gaining enemy respect. The strategy rests on a unit's commitment to training, resources, and integrating the ISF into operations. Task Force 1-18 committed 15 leaders and soldiers to live permanently with the 201st ING Battalion. A captain led the team of two lieutenants and several senior noncommissioned officers, squad leaders, and soldiers. The roster in figure 3 provides a useful template, but individual soldier personalities are far more important than rank. Iraqi National Guard cadre members must be carefully selected for patience and individual initiative. Working with the 201st ING Battalion, several TF 1-18 specialists developed systems to account for weapons and ammunition in the battalion's arms rooms, conduct battle tracking in the S3 shop, and implement a maintenance

program in the ING battalion. U.S. soldiers who live with the ING are administrators, role models, and individual trainers. CF companies carry out collective training, partner with specific ING units, and conduct joint operations against insurgents. Company commanders provide collective training while the cadre focuses on systems and mentorship.

Partnering U.S. units with Iraqi units deserves more elaboration. Task Force 1-18 companies partnered with Iraqi companies and trained platoons within the companies. Iraqi and U.S. squad leaders developed close working relationships and soldiered together during weapons qualification, collective training, joint operations, and partnership events. The battalions held quarterly partnership days that brought teams of Iraqi and U.S. soldiers to the field to compete against other combined teams. Activities did not foster competition between American and Iraqi teams but, rather, between Iraqis and Americans who habitually trained with each other. The partnering extended to awards ceremonies and combined operations. Leaders fostered bonds that promoted cohesion within Iraqi and American units.

Task Force 1-18 based its training strategy on

Figure 3. Cadre duties and responsibilities.

U.S. training management doctrine and focused on squad and platoon training tasks derived from a division quarterly training guidance mission-essential task list crosswalk. (See figure 4.) ING platoons became capable of independent operations within sector, and such operations were building blocks to achieving local control in Tikrit.[4]

While ING individual, squad, and platoon training helped generate confidence for combat operations, other techniques promoted public trust in the ING. Joint training and visible operations promoted CF and ISF unity, but independent operations allowed the ING to present an image of itself as a capable force. The ING conducted independent improvised explosive device sweeps, escorted their own supply convoys, and manned traffic control points (TCPs).

As the tempo of ING operations increased, insurgents increased attacks on ING members and their families. Had they not been well-trained and confident, many ING members might have quit when threatened, like the police in Samarra. However, the ING S2 targeted those who threatened ISF and CF and their interpreters, contractors, workers, and supporters in Tikrit. As a result, ING intelligence

was more valuable than most U.S. intelligence. Iraqi agents gathered information, and ING leaders imparted a sense of urgency to the effort. Intelligence had to be effective or the soldiers would pay a heavy price. Confident in themselves and armed with reliable intelligence, the 201st ING Battalion conducted raids and sweeps to deny safe haven to insurgents in Tikrit. President Bush once claimed: "Some Iraqis units have performed better than others. Some Iraqis have been intimidated enough by the insurgents to leave the service of their country. But a great many are standing firm."[5]

Engaging the Public

Task Force 1-18's civil affairs and company teams developed another technique that helped foster public trust in the ISF: they included the ING, INP, and other ISF in outreach programs. Public outreach is a vital aspect of information operations. The ISF conducted dozens of clothing giveaways, visited schools, and held charity drives and other events that generated public exposure and goodwill. The ING S5 was instrumental in these civil-military interactions.

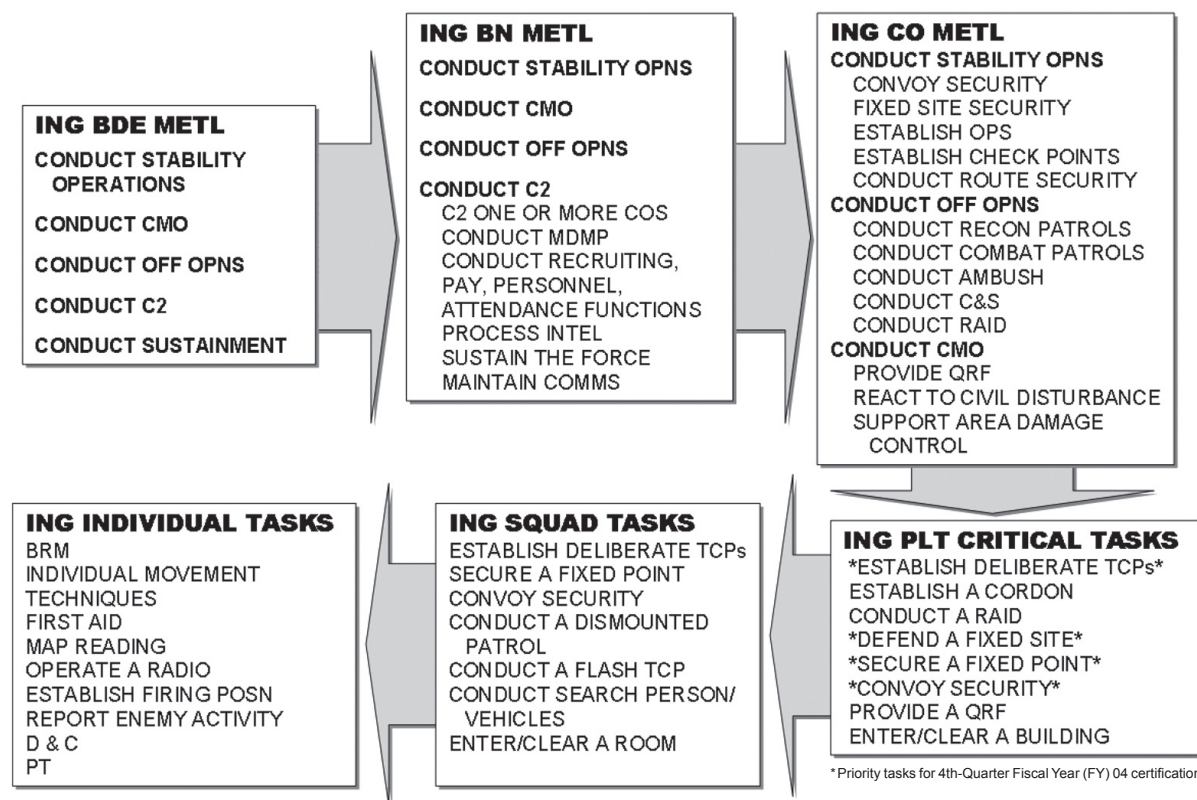The JCC, ISF, and CF registered every taxicab

Figure 4. ING mission-essential task list (METL) crosswalk.

in the city, conducted aerial reconnaissance of the security sector, exercised crisis response systems, distributed police equipment, and spot-checked training. Joint operations combined IO targeted at the population, the enemy, or both. For example, Operation Orange Crush was the task force's initiative to register all of the taxis in Tikrit. Intelligence indicated that insurgents were using taxis to transit the city and that many taxi drivers were involved in threats against contractors and interpreters. Task Force 1-18 companies and Iraqi police established TCPs and, over a 7-day period, funneled all taxis in Tikrit into inspection areas, questioned drivers, took photos of drivers and license plates, and placed registration stickers on each taxi.

The taxi drivers had no idea what CF and ISF would do with the information, but they could reliably believe that CF and ISF could identify them if they abetted insurgent attacks. The insurgents also had no idea what CF and ISF would do with the cab registrations, but they believed that CF and ISF were somehow tracking taxis within the city, a belief that made the enemy less likely to use cabs as transportation.

Coalition forces and ISF conducted early morning cordons and searches of neighborhoods, going from house to house looking for weapons and other contraband. A secondary objective, however, was to identify potential ex-military personnel who wanted a job. Soldiers selectively handed out job certificates that former Iraqi soldiers could cash in for employment in the Tikrit Job Corps. While such operations netted little in the way of contraband or detainees, insurgent attacks immediately declined. The rebels did not know what information CF and ISF had gleaned from the populace during the searches and reduced their attacks in the area.

These operations were simultaneously kinetic and informational. The ISF developed a core competency, and the operation's effects on the populace deprived the insurgents of safe havens.

Lessons Learned

Task Force 1-18 learned several lessons to nurture independent ISF:

• Leaders must be committed to a strategy that simultaneously promotes ISF development while combating insurgency.

• The strategy must contain specific MOEs that soldiers can understand.

• The environment demands creativity in assessing the threat, the population, and other socioeconomic variables. As T.E. Lawrence aptly said, "Irregular war is far more intellectual than a bayonet charge."[6]

• Leaders must help soldiers adapt to conditions that might require armored kinetic operations one week and dismounted civil-military operations the next.

• Units should train junior leaders to handle routine interactions with the populace so senior leaders can focus on problem areas and think through future strategies.

• There is no substitute for hard work and persistence. The entire task force must accomplish results, not only "pinning the rose," but integrating efforts across functional areas.

• Squad-leader partnering with the ISF helps commit the entire force to the strategy.

If units arrive in theater intent on making a difference, conditions in Iraq will continue to improve, and Iraqis will slowly take charge of their own security and governance. An obstinate insurgency will attempt to slow progress, but agility and persistence set the conditions for peace and stability. **MR**

NOTES

1. Robert B. Asprey, *War in the Shadows: The Guerilla in History* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1975), xii.
2. Robert Taber, *War of the Flea* (New York: L. Stuart, 1965), 64.
3. Andrew Krepinevich, "The War in Iraq: The Nature of Insurgency Warfare," Center for Strategic and Budgetary Studies, 2 June 2004, on-line at <www.csbaonline.org/4Publications/ Archive/B.20040602.NatofInsurge/B.20040602.NatofInsurge.pdf>, accessed 10 May 2005.
4. Local control is defined as JCC coordination of all Iraqi Security Forces activities in the area of operations, with an Iraqi National Guard capable of independent platoon-level operations and an Iraqi National Police force to facilitate basic law and order.
5. David E. Sanger, "Bush Gives Praise and Caution at Marine Base," *New York Times*, 8 December 2004.
6. T.E. Lawrence, "The Evolution of a Revolt," in *The Army Quarterly Journal*, vol. I, no. 1 (October 1920).

Major Steven M. Miska, U. S. Army, is operations officer, Task Force 1-18, Tikrit, Iraq. He received a B.S. from the U.S. Army Military Academy and an M.B.A. from Cornell University, and is a graduate of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College. He has served in various command and staff positions in the continental United States, Europe, Bosnia, and Iraq.